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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the results of a proposal written for an undergraduate fellowship program involving peer-tutoring. The program was established to provide tutor-fellows for students experiencing difficulties in their college curriculum. Inclass participation of the tutor allowed for closer classroom observation of student behavior and instructor techniques. Contributions by the tutor-fellow to classroom activities were permissable at the teacher's discretion. Positive gains generated through the Undergraduate Fellowship Program were many, such as: (1) improvement in communication and integration of activities between departments; (2) improvement of relationships between the instructor and students; (3) more responsible and independent participation of the students in classwork; and, (4) more conscientious preparation of students for classes. The Undergraduate Fellowship Program was viewed not only as a supportive aid to the students in need of assistance with their courses but also as a self-fulfilling experience for the students who served as tutor-fellows in the program. (Author/PC)

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The Undergraduate Fellowship Program
(Peer-tutoring)

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Undergraduate Fellowship Program
(Peer-tutoring)

Introduction and Rationale

A major problem in dealing with contemporary undergraduate students, particularly at the freshman-sophomore levels, is a need for better and fuller communication between the classroom instructor and the student. Many times a student has problems which are not clear to him and he is hesitant to discuss them with his instructor. This is true particularly in the case of many students in the SEEK Program where the students come from high schools where they have been underprepared and socio-economic backgrounds differ greatly from that of his instructor.

To help alleviate barriers which exist between students who are experiencing difficulty with their courses and the instructor, an experimental Undergraduate Fellowship Program, functionally known as peer-tutoring, was implemented in the Spring of 1973 at Baruch College and is sponsored by the Department of Compensatory Programs.

Barriers are reduced through this type of program because it provides tutors from the peers of the students seeking help in their courses. The tutors are called tutor-fellows and are selected from the undergraduate class and are, therefore, striving for the same goal as the student he is helping. That goal is the successful completion of the college courses.

One-to-one tutoring provides an atmosphere which is conducive to a free flowing discussion between two people, i.e. the tutor and the tutee. This type of situation differs

greatly from the impersonalized atmosphere of the classroom which is mainly teacher-dominated and where the discussions must be shared with many students. In peer-tutoring, a student receives individual attention which is crucial especially for underprepared students and the peer-tutor does not have the authoritative image of the instructor.

Method of Operation

The success of the Undergraduate Fellowship Program depends greatly on its method of operation. First of all, in the Department of Compensatory Programs tutoring is offered in the ten areas which, in the past, have had the greatest amount of difficulty for our students. These areas are: Mathematics, Accounting, Management, Marketing, Statistics, Spanish, History, Sociology, English, and Economics.

The most outstanding feature of the Undergraduate Fellowship Program is the in-class participation of the tutor. This means that the tutor sits in on the class in which he is tutoring a student. The tutor-fellow should attend his student's class once a week. If the tutor has more than one student, he should arrange to sit in on the class of the student who is having the most difficulty, if possible.

In some way under the direction of the classroom instructor, the tutor-fellow may contribute to the classroom activities. Following are suggestions of how the tutor-fellow can be used in the classroom: (1) Participation in class discussions in such a way as to offer a model of thoughtful student engagement; (2) Confer with members of the class about their assignments and progress; (3) Read and offer constructive criticism of written work submitted by students who seek assistance; and (4) When in the instructors judgement,

he is ready for additional responsibility, leads a limited number of class discussions under the instructor's direct guidance.

In-class participation enables the tutor-fellow to observe his student in the class and observe the techniques and procedures used by the instructor. This aspect of the peer-tutoring program helps the tutor-fellow get a better understanding of the student's problem and at the same time develop his own understanding of the course. This procedure should be of great assistance to the tutor-fellow in his private sessions with his students.

Conferences which include the student's counselor, the instructor and the tutor-fellow are held as needed. These conferences serve as a channel for discussion of the student's progress and any other problems which may be encountered. Students needing help sign up for tutoring through referrals from instructors, counselors, or by their own initiative.

There are three types of tutoring sessions available to students. They are as follows: one-to-one sessions where a student receives individual attention; small group sessions of two to three students from the same class and have similar problems with their course; and finally there is a Math Lab. The Math Lab is open daily and is a walk-in situation where the students do not need an appointment to attend. It is staffed with graduate students who are Math majors or are in areas which have a great deal of Mathematical concentration.

Criteria for Selection of Tutor-Fellows

The departments choosing to participate in the Under-

graduate Fellowship Program are permitted to participate in the selection of the tutor-fellows for the Program. The selections are based on the recommendations from the department of outstanding upperclassmen students in the areas of concern. In addition to the recommendations from the various departments, the candidates must meet certain academic requirements and must meet personality criteria set for establishing a meaningful rapport with the student. These requirements are as follows:

1. The candidate must have successfully completed the course he desires to tutor with a B- or better average in this area. This criteria has been amended by the fact that some instructors, especially in the area of Romance Languages, feel that some students currently enrolled in the course and doing well can tutor other students in that course.

2. The candidate must be recommended by members of the faculty who specialize in the academic area of concern.

3. The candidate must be able to relate to the student; i.e., he must have the capacity to empathize with the student and communicate the subject matter.

4. The candidate must be personable; i.e., he must be warm, congenial and approachable.

5. The candidate must have a genuine interest in the subject matter he is to tutor and a willingness to teach it to all students regardless of the level of understanding of the tutee.

6. The candidate should have a desire to provide academic assistance to students needing remedial work as well as helping those having problems with courses in the general credit bearing sequence.

7. The candidate must be able to establish a meaningful rapport with the instructor and the student.

It should be noted that a tutor will be dropped from the Undergraduate Fellowship Program if he exhibits an air of indifference toward his student's development. Such behavior on the tutor's part would gravely interfere with the student's learning process.

Minority Group Participation

Since the Department of Compensatory Programs has a large number of minority group students, it is important that Tutor-Fellows from minority groups be utilized as tutors as much as possible. Tutor-Fellows from socioeconomic backgrounds similar to those of students on Special Programs will be seen as peers who have achieved a goal for which others are striving. This fact will play a major role in motivating the special program students to complete their courses successfully.

Evaluation Procedure

The purpose of the evaluation procedure for the Undergraduate Fellowship Program is twofold: first, to help evaluate the degree to which the objectives of the program have been achieved; and second, to provide aid in individual classes for students who are having difficulty and to identify those academic areas in which help is needed.

Following are some of the evaluative procedures applicable to the peer-tutoring program.

Evaluation of Student Progress

Results of examinations given in class are used in evaluating student progress. Emphasis here is placed on the mid-term and the final exams. The results of each test given in class is recorded by the tutor-fellow on an on-going basis. This enables the tutor-fellow, counselor and coordinators to be aware of the students progress at all times. These

results provide a quantitative representation of the student's achievement in a particular course. If no progress is shown, the matter is examined immediately by the Coordinators to determine the nature of the problem and referred to the proper person for aid. Here the importance of periodic conferences with the instructor, the tutor-fellow, counselor, and student can be seen.

A final evaluation of the student's progress is made based on a follow up of the student's final grade in the course.

Evaluation of Tutor-Fellow

Questionnaires are sent to the instructors who had tutor-fellows sitting in on their classes. These questionnaires entail key issues such as: the tutor-fellow's knowledge of the subject-matter; his ability to communicate with his student; the tutor-fellow's possession of favorable or unfavorable personality characteristics.

Evaluation cards are sent to the students who received tutoring and they are asked to rate the following three categories: (1) Improvement of student's performance as a result of tutoring; (2) An individual rating of the student's tutor; (3) Rating of the overall peer-tutoring program.

Conclusion

The positive gains generated through the Undergraduate Fellowship Program have been many, such as: improvement in communicating and integrating the activities of the Department of Compensatory Programs and the other Academic Departments; improvement in relationships between the instructor and students; more responsible and independent participation of the students in their classwork; and finally, more conscientious preparation of students for classes.

An important incentive for the tutor-fellows is the fact that such an experience as this Program offers enables them to grow and mature significantly and develop their capacity for leadership. This educational experience increases, significantly, the tutor's awareness of teaching strategies and problems.

Finally, the Undergraduate Fellowship Program is not only a supportive aid to the students in need of assistance with their courses but also a self-fulfilling experience for the students who serve as tutor-fellows in the Program.